1. So You’re Considering Becoming a Judge

Judging is hard work, and judges are usually out-of-pocket on some of their judging expenses. But if you succeed in the difficult task of becoming a judge, the rewards will far outweigh that effort and expense.

As you judge, you usually become a better exhibitor. You will spend more time objectively analyzing exhibits and will better understand the rationale behind each section of the Exhibit Evaluation Form. You will learn a lot more about the different kinds of exhibits; especially those you have not tried to put together yourself (e.g., thematic, display). You will become part of a group (judges) with whom you share a passion. And by interacting more closely with those judges, you will get a variety of views on how to exhibit better; remember - exhibiting is an art – and so is judging.

Being a judge also allows you to give back to philately in an area that you obviously enjoy. As a judge, you will learn how to give feedback, to critique an exhibit. Feedback is a gift, but one that is not always accepted with the same generosity in which it is given. Each judge has learned his or her own way to provide feedback so that it is at least given consideration by the exhibitor, if not always accepted. And as you get exhibitors to think more about the suggestions you have made, and to implement them, you will help fellow exhibitors improve their exhibits and achieve higher medal levels.

Yes, judging as many as 50-55 exhibits at a WSP show and being personally responsible for the feedback on as many as 10 of them takes a lot of work. You can spend dozens of hours reviewing the title pages and synopses you get before the show, and dozens more becoming more familiar with the specific exhibits you are assigned by the Chief judge.

But the knowledge you gain from that research will be invaluable and may lead you into new areas for your own exhibits. As you become accredited and gain more judging experience, you will learn to do that preparation more efficiently. And the APRL is a great resource to help you with that research.

Apprentices generally do not receive a stipend from the show, but you will get a banquet ticket and perhaps a meal or two. Accredited judges do receive an honorarium of $300-350, but that will not completely cover room, travel and sundry expenses. Judges certainly do not do this for the money! They do it for all the reasons explained above.

So, if you want to become a judge, it won’t be easy and might even take some of the budget you have for philatelic material. But it may just become one of the most worthwhile and satisfying efforts you will undertake in your philatelic career.
2. Judging Requirements and Suggestions

There are a few specific requirements and several suggestions if you are interested in becoming a judge.

**Requirements** include:
- Being a member of the American Philatelic Society;
- Having won an adult multiframe vermeil or higher medal at a WSP show. If you are going to judge others’ exhibit and help them achieve higher medal levels, you must personally have achieved those levels yourself.
- Meeting all requirements of the APS Apprenticeship Program.
- Attending the required CANEJ approved seminars before your fourth apprenticeship.
- Being able to spend 5-8 hours at the frames standing and bending down to look at the bottom row!

**Suggestions** to help you understand whether you want to become a judge include:
- **Practice Judging.** At a WSP show, develop a point score for each exhibit using the EEF sheet (see *The APS Manual of Philatelic Judging and Exhibiting*) before the medal level ribbons are posted. Even without the synopsis that the judges have, and the ability to have done research on the subject, you can still get a feel for what the exhibitor is trying to communicate. Compare the medal level you come up with to that of the judges. When they differ, especially by more than one medal level, find a member of the jury who has finished their work and discuss that difference with them. If the subject is obscure, and you can find the exhibitor, they can provide details that also may help.
- **Attend the feedback session.** Check the show program. It is usually in the afternoon before the awards banquet. Listen especially to the comments on those exhibits where your medal level was different from that of the Jury.
- **Talk to different judges.** At the shows you attend, find judges who are not on the panel who can spend time with you in front of the frames.
3. Preparation

First, download the Application form from the Committee on the Accreditation of National Exhibitions and Judges (CANEJ) on the APS website (www.stamps.org) under the Accredited Judges Forms. Send the completed forms to the Chairman of the CANEJ Committee.

If accepted as an apprentice, you will receive acknowledgement that you have been accepted, and you will be listed as an Apprentice on the APS website listing of judges. The apprentice program requires that you serve successfully at a minimum of four WSP shows. When considering shows for your apprenticeship, contact the Chair of CANEJ for guidance, because this individual must approve each show chosen for your apprenticeships. In some cases, specific shows will be recommended to you. The apprenticeship program should be completed within five years, but most apprentices complete the program within 18 months.

As an apprentice, you will be sent Title Pages and Synopses relating to the exhibits, usually 6-8 weeks before the show. Make The APS Manual of Philatelic Judging and Exhibiting your main resource. It is full of suggestions and explains the various judging criteria. For each show, the chief judge will assign the exhibits for which you will be first responder – the judge who is responsible to prepare the detailed feedback on a specific exhibit. In your first two apprenticeships, some of the assigned exhibits will be out of your “comfort zone” or area of expertise. The jury will act as your mentors guiding you through the process of judging. In your third and fourth apprenticeships, most of the exhibits will be out of your area of expertise. It is important that you demonstrate willingness and ability to judge all kinds of exhibits, not just ones you know about or are interested in. Judging gives you an opportunity to do in-depth research on those exhibits; however, all judges judge all exhibits, so you must also prepare for the other exhibits that will be judged.

At first, preparation time will be relatively lengthy as you learn about subjects and exhibit types unfamiliar to you. As you progress through your apprenticeship, time management becomes easier. When you are unclear in your preparation or appropriate resources for information, reach out to the jury chair before the show. Gather your Title Pages and Synopsis sheets and notes that you have made and put them in your study notebook, with a blank copy of the EEF for each exhibit for taking notes. Some shows provide the Judges/Apprentice with these “notebooks” but always be prepared in case they don't.

There are many resources for researching exhibits: American Philatelic Research Library (www.stamps.org), regional philatelic libraries such as Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library, the Internet, catalogs, and books. Some libraries, like the APRL, will ship materials to you or send you scans of small articles. Each exhibitor’s synopsis should also give you a list of references.
4. Show Participation

Get to the show mid-afternoon the day before the show opens. In many cases, this gives you time to view the exhibits as they are being mounted. The Jury Chair may organize a “walk-through” on the afternoon before the show opens, giving the jury additional time to discuss the various exhibits. This is a great opportunity and should not be missed. If there is no organized walk through, go by yourself or find another judge to go with you.

The first day of the exhibition, there is usually an early breakfast for the jury and key show committee members. While the Jury Chair used to divide the jury members into teams for the judging, since the advent of the point system, juries more often work as a group.

During your first two apprenticeships, the judge and jury will be mentoring your evaluation skills and assessing your preparation. The emphasis of the last two apprenticeships will be on communication skills and broadening your philatelic knowledge.

The Jury Chair will establish the time schedule. Judging at the frames takes from three to six hours depending on the size of the show. Lunch and other breaks are taken during the judging session. At the frames, your mentors will often ask you for your point assignment for a specific part of the EEF (e.g., treatment) and several reasons why you chose that point score. You will need to be prepared for this process for every exhibit, not only the ones assigned to you as first responder. You will learn from the jury members on your team how they evaluate each exhibit. During the floor work, juries usually come to agreement on the point score (and medal level) for each exhibit, possibly reviewing those very close to another medal level and those which may be a departure from the medal levels the same exhibit received at recent shows.

In the Jury Room, the focus will likely be on the special awards. There are a lot of special awards, and the apprentice should be familiar with the criteria used to make those awards. Learning about these early on will be useful.

It is important that an apprentice actively take part in the formal Feedback Session; your participation will be evaluated by the Jury Chair. The evaluation will include your ability to speak clearly and confidently about your feedback. The Jury Chair will invite exhibitors to ask their questions. If you are the first responder, seek to be of positive help, and speak to the consensus of the jury. Keep your responses at the Feedback Session short and to the point. It is possible that an apprentice will not be called upon as a first responder in the Feedback Session. In that case, the Chief Judge may specifically ask the apprentice to present information on various exhibits in order to assess their communication skills.

Rather than engage in extensive or detailed remarks, suggest to the exhibitor that you are willing to meet with him/her at the frames. It is helpful to make a copy of the EEF for your own use when you meet with exhibitors at the frames.
5. After the Show

The Jury Chair will consult with the other judges after the show to evaluate your overall performance at the show. Following this, he/she will complete an apprentice evaluation report which will be sent to CANEJ. The Jury Chair will meet with you to go over your performance and discuss your strengths and any weaknesses that were observed. A thank you email or note to the Show Committee and to your fellow judges is always appropriate.

6. Applying for Accreditation

The Apprenticeship Program is demanding and requires the development of specialized skills, but the program has been proven to be an effective development tool to train new judges. Following your successful completion of the apprentice program your candidacy as an accredited judge will be reviewed, discussed and voted on by CANEJ. On approval, your name is forwarded to the APS for addition to the APS Accredited Judges list. Now you can apply to shows asking to be put on their jury lists for future shows. Juries are usually chosen six to nine months ahead of the show date. It helps to talk to other judges and show chairs, and make known your willingness to travel out of your area. Become known in the wider philatelic community by exhibiting, because name recognition is always helpful in getting assignments. Consider applying to judge local and regional shows in your area. While they do not offer remuneration in most cases, they are a great way to practice and to see potential exhibits before they make it to the national shows. It is also a great way to make friends. Think about putting together exhibits that are out of your field of expertise. This is a way to understand the challenges offered to exhibitors in the various types of exhibits. Remember, to continue as an active judge you must continue to exhibit as well as judge, and every other year you will be asked to provide evidence of exhibiting and judging to CANEJ.